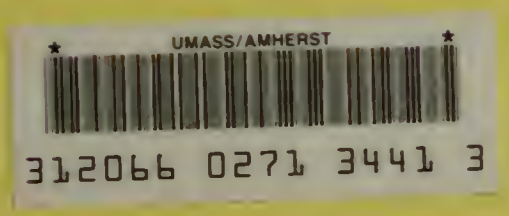
MASS. ED25.2:ST89/4



Structuring Schools for Student Success...

SYSTEMIC SCHOOL CHANGE: A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO RAISING ACHIEVEMENT AND KEEPING STUDENTS IN SCHOOL

SCHOOL OR DISTRICT ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT

GOVERNMENT DOCUMENT COLLECTION
SEP 24 1991
University of Massachusetts
Depository Copy

Bureau of Student Development and Health
Massachusetts Department of Education

912/214

Massachusetts Board of Education

James F. Crain, Gloucester, Chairperson
Raquel Bauman, Holden, Vice Chairperson

John H. Gould, Waltham
William K. Irwin, Wilmington
Joseph E. Killory, Sandwich
Anne S. Larkin, Bedford
Dr. Richard R. Rowe, Belmont
Jon Silverman, Worcester
Theodora A. Sylvester, Springfield
Frances M. Turner, South Egremont
Joan Wallace-Benjamin, Boston
Frederick A. Wang, Needham

Commissioner Harold Raynolds, Jr., Secretary

Developed by:

The Division of School Programs
Elizabeth Twomey, Associate Commissioner

The Bureau of Student Development and Health
Carl Gustafson, Director
George S. Perry, Jr., Program Director

The Regional Laboratory of the Northeast and Islands

Written by:
Dan French, Dropout Prevention Specialist
Leslie Hergert, Director, At-Risk Youth Initiative, Regional Laboratory

May, 1990

For additional information, call the Bureau of Student Development and Health at (617) 770-7589.

The Massachusetts Department of Education insures equal employment/ educational opportunities/affirmative action regardless of race, color, creed, national origin or sex, in compliance with Title VI and Title IX, or handicap, in compliance with section 504.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The development of this survey instrument would not have been possible without the advice and assistance of many individuals within the Department of Education. We appreciate the many thoughtful comments from the professionals below.

Massachusetts Department of Education Staff

Pam Chamberlain, Interagency Coordination Specialist
Bureau of Student Development and Health
John Desses, Student Services Specialist
Southeast Regional Education Center
Georgia Parafestas, Student Services Specialist
Central Mass. Regional Education Center
George S. Perry, Jr., Project Director
Bureau of Student Development and Health
Ann Sheehan, Dropout Prevention Specialist
Northeast Regional Education Center
Carole Thomson, Executive Director
Division of School Programs
Donna Wied, Student Services Specialist
Western Mass. Regional Education Center
Jack Wright, Student Services Specialist
Western Mass. Regional Education Center

As well, we deeply appreciate the comments from Anne Wheelock, Policy Analyst at the Massachusetts Advocacy Center.

INTRODUCTION:
THE NEED FOR SYSTEMIC SCHOOL CHANGE

Today's schools have the challenge of preparing students to be thoughtful, productive, and responsible citizens in a democratic society. A school's success can be measured by its ability to engage students in learning experiences that raise their academic achievement, increase their cognitive skills, meet their individual social and emotional needs, and keep them in school through high school graduation. To successfully lower dropout, suspension, and grade retention rates while raising achievement and attendance rates, schools must focus less on student background characteristics and behaviors and more on the school conditions that place students at risk.

To accomplish this, systemic school-based changes are required to foster learning environments that meet the emotional, social, physical, and intellectual needs of all students. Systemic school change is defined as:

> **Fundamental changes in traditional school organization, governance, policies, programs, and practices with the goal of raising academic achievement, improving students' social and emotional growth and development, enhancing the school climate, and expanding roles of staff.**

A more complete description of systemic school change and a rationale for this approach to raising achievement and preventing dropouts is presented in a companion Department publication entitled *Systemic School Change: A Comprehensive Approach to Raising Achievement and Keeping Students in School.* The fifteen sections of this assessment instrument match those within the systemic school change report.

Assessment and Creating a Plan for Change

Lasting change is the result of a thoughtful and planned process that has included the input of as many stakeholders as possible. Consequently, assessment is an important part of initiating change. Assessment includes the identification of a school's strengths and problem areas, which are then used as a base of information upon which to develop a school change plan.

Research has identified several different steps for assessing and creating a plan for systemic school change.

1) **Team Formation.** An initial team representing a cross-section of the school or district is formed to undertake the assessment and

planning process. This team should include an administrator, teachers, parents, and, at the high school level, students.

2) **Develop a Common Framework and Knowledge Base.** It is helpful for the team to read a sampling of the current literature on school improvement and restructuring, and to review current data on the school or district (e.g., demographics, grade retention, attendance, suspension and achievement rates). For the purposes of this assessment, the Department publication on systemic school change should be read.

3) **Conduct a Survey or Assessment.** The team agrees upon and conducts a survey or assessment within the target school(s) in order to gather information that will provide a detailed portrayal of current issues and concerns. Staff, administrators, parents and students are surveyed. This particular survey is most geared to teachers and administrators, although it could be used for parents and students.

4) **Analyze and Report the Findings and Gain Input.** The findings are tabulated and major strengths and problem areas are identified. These results are reported in an accessible manner to all constituencies through parent forums, teacher meetings and community presentations. Input is sought on identifying priority problem areas and strategies to address them. This provides everyone with a chance to give input into the plan to be developed.

5) **Develop a Plan of Action.** The assessment results become the foundation from which a plan of, and timeline for, systemic school change is developed. Usually, this plan contains a mission statement, a three to five year plan for improvement, and specific steps to be taken the first year.

6) **Careful Implementation of the Action Plan.** Often, it is best to pilot new programs or approaches before phasing in full implementation.

7) **Evaluation and Replication.** Based on an evaluation of initial implementation of the plan, improvements are made and the revised plan is replicated school or district-wide.

The following assessment instrument is one of many that could be used as a basis for developing a plan for systemic school change. The criteria listed within each section are by no means the sole criteria that could be used within an assessment process; other criteria could be substituted. As well, a school or district could choose to assess some instead of all of the sections. School district staff are encouraged to use this instrument in ways that are helpful in planning for change.

KEY

The following key explains the rating categories used within the assessment instrument:

Rating: Use the rating column to identify the level of satisfaction in this systemic school change area.

1 = Unsatisfactory; nothing or very little has been done in this area or this has not been accomplished or undertaken.

2 = Not enough has been done in this area. There is, though, active staff interest, and/or intitial progress has been made. Information has been distributed and/or initial meetings have been held.

3 = Initial implementation of this area is taking place, or this area has been accomplished, with some need for improvement.

4 = Satisfactory; implementation of this area has been institutionalized within the school, and is periodically refined to improve it.

Needs/Problems: Use this column to document specific needs or problems that should be addressed in relation to the systemic school change area.

Solutions/Strategies: Use this column to write down recommended solutions or strategies to resolve identified needs which, if implemented, would increase the level of satisfaction with this systemic school change area.

Assessment Instrument

SYSTEMIC SCHOOL CHANGE ASSESSMENT

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR SYSTEMIC SCHOOL CHANGE	NEEDS/PROBLEMS	SATISFACTION RATING LOW HI	SOLUTIONS/STRATEGIES
1. Creating a Mission Statement			
a. A mission statement has been developed which articulates a school vision that all children can learn; and that supports the emotional, social, intellectual, and physical growth and development of students.		1 2 3 4	
b. The mission statement was developed with wide input from students, parents, staff, and community members.		1 2 3 4	
c. School policies, programs, and practices have been reviewed and revised to reflect the principles of the mission statement.		1 2 3 4	

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR SYSTEMIC SCHOOL CHANGE	NEEDS/PROBLEMS	SATISFACTION RATING LOW HI	SOLUTIONS/STRATEGIES
2. Shared Decision-Making			
a. A governance committee or structure exists that includes representatives and active participation of all constituencies of the school community, including parents, students, and staff.		1 2 3 4	
b. The governance committee meets regularly and makes decisions around a wide range of school issues (e.g., hiring of staff, curriculum, resource allocation, school rules and policies, programmatic changes).		1 2 3 4	
c. Faculty are involved in instructional decisions.		1 2 3 4	
d. Students are involved in problem-solving through student governance and intervention programs (e.g. mediation, group meetings).		1 2 3 4	
e. Students, parents, teachers and administrators are involved in reviewing school rules and procedures to ensure their being consonant with the mission statement.		1 2 3 4	

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR SYSTEMIC SCHOOL CHANGE	NEEDS/PROBLEMS	SATISFACTION RATING LOW HI	SOLUTIONS/STRATEGIES
3. Inclusive School Climate			
a. Cultural diversity is acknowledged, respected, and celebrated			
- in halls and other public display areas;		1 2 3 4	
- in classroom practices;		1 2 3 4	
- in selection of curriculum materials;		1 2 3 4	
- in all activities;		1 2 3 4	
- in staff development.		1 2 3 4	
b. Procedures and systems assure that all students feel safe and able to participate in all offerings of the school (e.g. conflict resolution, racial discipline, sexual harassment rules, sensitivity training).		1 2 3 4	

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR SYSTEMIC SCHOOL CHANGE	NEEDS/PROBLEMS	SATISFACTION RATING LOW HI	SOLUTIONS/STRATEGIES
4. Supportive & Flexible School Policies			
a. Flexible course credit arrangements (e.g. coop credit) allow students to meet graduation requirements via a variety of programs and courses.		1 2 3 4	
b. Students are retained in grade only in unique situations, and are provided with accelerated instruction designed to bring the student back to grade-appropriate instruction and level.		1 2 3 4	
c. Discipline policies encourage problem resolution and keeping students in school, with out-of-school and in-school suspension used only as a last resort.		1 2 3 4	
d. Attendance policies reflect a positive approach to school attendance, employ therapeutic approaches with non-attenders, and use punitive measures only as a last resort.		1 2 3 4	
e. Health policies emphasize treatment and prevention options, rather than solely punitive measures, for students with health problems.		1 2 3 4	

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR SYSTEMIC SCHOOL CHANGE	NEEDS/PROBLEMS	SATISFACTION RATING LOW HI	SOLUTIONS/STRATEGIES
5. Clustering and Program Diversity			
a. The student body is clustered into smaller communities of learners, with each cluster having its defined space within the school building.		1 2 3 4	
b. Clusters are heterogeneous cross-sections of the student population.		1 2 3 4	
c. Students take core academic classes within clusters.		1 2 3 4	
d. Clusters offer students a variety of learning styles and programmatic foci.		1 2 3 4	

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR SYSTEMIC SCHOOL CHANGE	NEEDS/PROBLEMS	SATISFACTION RATING LOW HI	SOLUTIONS/STRATEGIES
6. Teaming of Staff			
a. Teachers are organized into teams and have common planning time to coordinate curriculum development and monitor individual student progress.		1 2 3 4	
b. Collegiality systems are in place to ensure coordination and teaming with special education, bilingual education, Chapter I, vocational education and electives teachers, and guidance staff.		1 2 3 4	
c. Teams have regular communication and meeting time with the administration.		1 2 3 4	
d. Teacher teams have decision making responsibility regarding curriculum, instruction, scheduling, cluster activities, team resources, and the monitoring of student progress.		1 2 3 4	

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR SYSTEMIC SCHOOL CHANGE	NEEDS/PROBLEMS	SATISFACTION RATING LOW HI	SOLUTIONS/STRATEGIES
<u>7. Grouping of Students</u>			
a. Students are heterogeneously grouped for the majority of the school day.		1 2 3 4	
b. Cross-age, multi-grade grouping of students occurs regularly.		1 2 3 4	
c. The composition of within-class groupings of students changes regularly.		1 2 3 4	
d. In-class instructional support, rather than pull-out services, is provided to accelerate the learning pace of low-achieving students (e.g., Chapter I, special education and remedial services.)		1 2 3 4	
e. Students of all racial, ethnic and gender backgrounds are proportionately represented in all programs of the school.		1 2 3 4	

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR SYSTEMIC SCHOOL CHANGE	NEEDS/PROBLEMS	SATISFACTION RATING LOW HI	SOLUTIONS/STRATEGIES
8. Flexible or Block Scheduling			
a. Block scheduling is utilized to enable sustained investigation of problems and concepts.		1 2 3 4	
b. Scheduling accommodates varied learning approaches and work/community experience.		1 2 3 4	
c. Flexible scheduling is utilized to enable adjustment of the schedule to allow for guest speakers, field trips, and other special learning activities.		1 2 3 4	
d. Scheduling permits students with unusual time constraints (e.g., need to care for someone at home) to receive a full educational program.		1 2 3 4	

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR SYSTEMIC SCHOOL CHANGE	NEEDS/PROBLEMS	SATISFACTION RATING LOW HI	SOLUTIONS/STRATEGIES
9. Interdisciplinary Curriculum			
a. The curriculum concentrates on core concepts and competencies.		1 2 3 4	
b. Fragmentation of the school day and of student learning has been reduced by providing fewer and longer courses within each quarter or semester.		1 2 3 4	
c. The curriculum is thematic and interdisciplinary across all subjects.		1 2 3 4	
d. The curriculum is rooted in real life, problem-solving experiences.		1 2 3 4	
e. The curriculum reflects the accomplishments and contributions of all students' ethnic, racial, religious and gender backgrounds.		1 2 3 4	
f. The curriculum builds a sense of social responsibility towards society as a fundamental democratic value.		1 2 3 4	
g. Reading and writing are integrated across the curriculum, with the goal of making every student a reader and a writer.		1 2 3 4	

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR SYSTEMIC SCHOOL CHANGE	NEEDS/PROBLEMS	SATISFACTION RATING LOW HI	SOLUTIONS/STRATEGIES
<u>10. Innovative Instructional Strategies</u>			
a. Students' learning styles are identified in an effort to match instruction to students' strengths.		1 2 3 4	
b. Varied instructional strategies are used in addition to traditional teacher-centered instruction (e.g., cooperative learning, peer tutoring, project-based learning), and provide students with multiple opportunities for active learning.		1 2 3 4	
c. Instructional approaches ensure mastery of skills.		1 2 3 4	
d. Classroom teachers function as coaches and facilitators rather than purveyors of knowledge.		1 2 3 4	
e. Peer support is built into the classroom through cooperative learning and other peer group strategies.		1 2 3 4	
f. Teachers regularly seek student feedback on how to improve classes.		1 2 3 4	
g. An increased emphasis is placed upon the teaching of higher order thinking skills (e.g., problem-solving, reasoning, logic, analysis, synthesis, and experimentation).		1 2 3 4	

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR SYSTEMIC SCHOOL CHANGE	NEEDS/PROBLEMS	SATISFACTION RATING LOW HI	SOLUTIONS/STRATEGIES
<u>11. Grading and Assessment of Student Progress</u>			
a. Student progress is assessed regularly throughout the year and used to provide instructional support and/or adjust curriculum content or instructional style.		1 2 3 4	
b. Portfolio and exhibition approaches are used to assess mastery of material, rather than traditional forms of test-taking.		1 2 3 4	
c. Grading is based upon continuous progress of mastery of core concepts and competencies, or is replaced by narrative assessment of student progress.		1 2 3 4	
d. The focus of assessment and grading practices helps achieve stated objectives for learning.		1 2 3 4	

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR SYSTEMIC SCHOOL CHANGE	NEEDS/PROBLEMS	SATISFACTION RATING LOW HI	SOLUTIONS/STRATEGIES
12. A Focus on Student Support			
a. Attention is given to supporting students' social, emotional, and physical growth and development.		1 2 3 4	
b. School structures enable staff to provide personal support and attention to students through advisory, mentor, and/or life issues programs.		1 2 3 4	
c. Social and health services are provided to students and coordinated with community agencies (e.g., social worker, case management).		1 2 3 4	
d. Peer support groups exist on life issues (e.g., parenting, substance abuse).		1 2 3 4	
e. Recognition programs exist to honor a range of positive student accomplishments.		1 2 3 4	
f. Bilingual, bicultural staff are available to support students and their parents.		1 2 3 4	

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR SYSTEMIC SCHOOL CHANGE	NEEDS/PROBLEMS	SATISFACTION RATING LOW HI	SOLUTIONS/STRATEGIES
13. Parents as Active Participants			
a. Parents have multiple opportunities to be involved in the school.		1 2 3 4	
b. Information about the school and the student is sent home regularly and in appropriate languages.		1 2 3 4	
c. Outreach to parents is coordinated by a staff person (e.g., Parent Liaison, Teacher Advisors).		1 2 3 4	
d. Parent conferences and activities are scheduled to meet parents' needs (e.g., transportation, child care, home visits, translation).		1 2 3 4	
e. Parents are used as learning resources in the school and at home.		1 2 3 4	
f. Parents are involved in making decisions about the school.		1 2 3 4	
g. Support to families is provided through coordination with community agencies.		1 2 3 4	
h. Parent education is provided to assist them in supporting their child's education.		1 2 3 4	

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR SYSTEMIC SCHOOL CHANGE	NEEDS/PROBLEMS	SATISFACTION RATING LOW HI	SOLUTIONS/STRATEGIES
14. Creative Staff Development			
a. Teachers examine issues that are crucial to raising academic achievement of all students, such as teacher expectations, diverse instructional strategies, and learning styles.		1 2 3 4	
b. All staff learn about the cultural background of their students.		1 2 3 4	
c. Staff development is staff-driven and connected to staff needs.		1 2 3 4	
d. Staff development is on-going and provides follow-up to ensure use.		1 2 3 4	
e. Multiple opportunities for staff development (e.g. peer observation, support groups, visitations) are provided.		1 2 3 4	
f. Staff are encouraged to experiment with new ideas.		1 2 3 4	

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR SYSTEMIC SCHOOL CHANGE	NEEDS/PROBLEMS	SATISFACTION RATING LOW HI	SOLUTIONS/STRATEGIES
15. Community Collaboration			
a. Opportunities for real-world application of learning are provided (e.g., work experience, apprenticeship, community service).		1 2 3 4	
b. Community agencies provide school-site social services to students and families.		1 2 3 4	
c. Higher education partnerships provide expanded learning opportunities and future options for students and teachers.		1 2 3 4	
d. Public support of education is actively and continually sought.		1 2 3 4	

STRUCTURING SCHOOLS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

OTHER PUBLICATIONS IN THE SERIES

Changing Schools and Communities: A Systemic Approach to Dropout Prevention, November 1989

A Focus on Ability Grouping, January 1990

Teacher Support Teams: Meeting the Challenge of At-Risk Students in Regular Education, February 1990

Systemic School Change: A Comprehensive Approach to Raising Achievement and Keeping Students in School, February, 1990

A Focus on Grade Retention, May 1990

Educating the Whole Student: The School's Role in the Physical, Intellectual, Social and Emotional Development of Students, April 1990